
AN EVALUATION OF THE HOWE DEVELOPMENTAL CENTER CLOSURE

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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The Howe Developmental Center closed on June 21, 2010. One hundred and eighty-one individuals moved to seven other State Operated Developmental Centers (SODCs) in Illinois; 45 moved to Community Integrated Living Arrangements (CILAs); and 19 moved to Intermediate Care Facilities for persons with Developmental Disabilities (ICFs/DD). One individual moved to a family CILA and one individual moved out of the state.

In the spirit of continued monitoring of outcomes for individuals transitioning out of Illinois SODCs, the Department of Human Services' Division of Developmental Disabilities contracted the Institute on Disability and Human Development (IDHD) at the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC) to conduct an evaluation of stakeholders' experiences of the Howe closure.

The primary objective of the present evaluation was to examine stakeholders' experiences with the closure and transition process and outcomes as well as the individual's satisfaction with their current living situation. Information was collected in two phases from both individuals who moved out of Howe as well as guardians/family members who had a relative/ward living at Howe when closure was announced. Two hundred and forty-four surveys were mailed to family members and guardians. One hundred and three were returned to UIC, a response rate of 42%. A third (33%) of respondents identified themselves as the sibling of the person transitioned out of Howe, 31% reported being a parent, 6% other family, 3% reported being a friend, and the remaining 27% identified themselves as public guardians. In addition, interviews were conducted with 17 former Howe residents.

KEY FINDINGS

What are some of the basic trends associated with closure, transition, and placement?

- Fifty-eight percent (58%) of respondents reported their family member/ward had lived at Howe for 20 or more years.
- 71% of respondents reported their loved one moved to an SODC, 22% to a CILA, and 6% to an ICF/DD – these percentages are representative of the total population that moved from Howe.
- Fifty six percent (56%) of respondents felt their family member was better off now than at Howe, 34% felt their relative/ward was the same, and 11% felt their family member/ward was worse.
- Only one of 92 respondents indicated their family member had no housemates at the new placement.
- Visitation really only changed for people who used to visit weekly at Howe (went from 20% of sample at Howe to 13% of sample at new setting). Now this portion of respondents appears to be visiting quarterly.

How satisfied are family/guardians with the closure and its outcomes?

- Most respondents (80%) were dissatisfied with the initial decision to close Howe. Among family/friends, 89% reported dissatisfaction.
- After the closure the overall percent of family/guardians dissatisfied with the closure dropped to 63%.
- Over half of all respondents (62%) indicated that they did not change their feelings about the decision to close Howe. Over one-third (36%) now feel more positively about the decision and a small percentage (2%) now feel more negatively about it.

What were the differences in attitudes towards closure and to community placements between family and state guardians?

- State guardians more often reported being dissatisfied with the transition process than family/friends (67% vs. 28%).
- While 58% of state guardians responded that they felt community placement could be beneficial to their ward, none of the wards of state guardians who responded to the survey reported a move to a CILA.
- Prior to the closure of Howe, only 14% of family members felt the community would be a beneficial place for their loved one. The percentage dropped to 8% if you narrowed it down to family respondents over age 60.
- Most of the state guardians (86%) reported visiting zero agencies prior to making a placement decision compared to only 26% of family/friends. However, 79% of state guardians indicated that they had visited the new placement prior to the transition, suggesting that state guardians may have visited these agencies prior to the announced closure of Howe.

To what extent did age and level of need affect the type of setting people moved to and family/guardian attitudes to the closure, family placements, and closure's outcomes?

- Among all respondents, higher levels of assistance needs were associated with increased levels of dissatisfaction with the initial decision to close Howe (74% of respondents whose family member had high assistance needs reported being "very dissatisfied" versus 55% of moderate assistance needs and 40% with low assistance needs).
- 20% of those with high assistance needs moved to a CILA.
- Among all respondents, those with older relatives/wards (age 60+) more often reported some level of dissatisfaction with the closure process (56%).
- Twenty-six percent of family members did not visit the new placement -- this percentage increases to 33% if you limit responses to family members over the age of 60. Approximately 16% of respondents under the age of 60 did not visit the new placement.
- Respondents with relatives aged 65 and over all felt that their relative was better off (or the same) at their new placement than they were at Howe; of those with relatives between the ages of 50 and 64, 13% felt their relative was doing worse; and of those with relatives younger than 50, 16% felt their relative was doing worse.

To what extent did type of setting influence family/guardian attitudes to closure, community placements and closure outcomes?

- Over three-quarters (77%) of those reporting a move to a CILA reported having a positive opinion about the benefits of community placement after closure.
- For those respondents whose family members moved to a CILA, 53% reported a positive change in their opinion about the benefits of community placement for their family member (47% did not change their opinions on community supports over time).
- Over 95% of respondents whose family member moved to a CILA reported visiting the new home prior to the move.

What are the lessons learned regarding family/guardian supports for the transition?

- The transition hotline is underutilized; 50% did not use the service and 27% did not know about the service. 17% found the service helpful, while 6% did not. Lack of awareness of the hotline was especially true for family members (30% were unaware of hotline) and non-white respondents (50%).